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RAHMENERZÄHLUNG UND VERWANDTES, bei G. Keller, C. F. Meyer und Th. Storm. Ein Beitrag zur Technik der Novelle von Hans Bracher. Untersuchungen zur neueren Sprach- und Literatur-Geschichte, herausgegeben von Prof. Dr. Oskar F. Walzel. Neue Folge. III. Heft. H. Haessel Verlag in Leipzig, 1909. pp. VIII & 132.

How refractory is the English language! It permits of description but balks at nomenclature. Its words do duty as individuals but refuse to enter into combination, except they be linked together under sullen protest by the inflexible hyphen. Even this form of union seems to be going out of fashion and the divorce court of the lexicographer is called upon with ever increasing frequency to sever the marital bonds of unhappy word couples that refuse longer to cohabit.

What shall we say for our author's *Rahmenerzählung*? *Story-within-the-story* is descriptive but cumbersome and not sufficiently comprehensive. Mr. Root, in his *Poetry of Chaucer*, speaking of the device employed by the compiler for giving collective unity to the *Arabian Nights*, uses the expression *framework story*, referring, however, to the outer narrative and not to the work as a whole. Even the *Decameron*, the classic illustration of this form of fiction, has not as yet called forth a term applicable to its literary type. Under the circumstances we are constrained to create terms for ourselves, hoping that if they do not find general acceptance they may at least serve as stepping stones to something better. Let us then call this type of literature *framework fiction*. The inner story we will designate as the *framed* or *enframed tale*, and the outer story the *enframing narrative*, since the latter turns out to be more often a brief narration than a complete recital with well marked beginning, climax and conclusion.

To return to the work before us. As he indicates in the title, Dr. Bracher does not aim to present the history of framework fiction in general, but confines himself to a study of this literary form in the works of the three authors mentioned. The author's original purpose of offering a sketch of framework fiction in German literature was defeated by the appearance of

the dissertation by Moritz Goldstein, *Technik der zyklischen Rahmenerzählungen Deutschlands. Von Goethe bis Hoffmann*. Nevertheless, in his introduction Dr. Bracher in a few well chosen words calls attention to the antiquity of this literary form and to its oriental origin. The compilers of the oriental collections, Hitopadesa, Pancatantra, Arabian Nights, etc., were, in a much higher degree than is now possible, collectors rather than originators, *Finder* rather than *Erfinder*. If the modern poet, to use the words of Spielhagen, is *der liederreiche Mund seines Volkes*, the ancient poet was rather *der Mund seines liederreichen Volkes*. Substitute story, fairy tale, anecdote for song, and the statement still holds true. The ancient poet had only to fashion a suitable receptacle, the contents were ready at hand. The primitive receptacle is comparable, therefore, with an urn or a chest rather than a frame, for unlike the latter its capacity to receive is unlimited.

If the modern writer has less material at his disposal he possesses on the other hand a greater desire for artistic effect and for a more vital relationship between the framework and the enframed tale. The old story cycles with their relatively unimportant setting have been succeeded, therefore, today in general by a single story inseparably embedded in an enclosing medium. After a brief discussion of the Thousand and One Nights, the Book of the Seven Sages, the Decameron and its numerous successors and German framework fiction from Goethe's *Unterhaltungen* to Hoffmann's *Serapionsbrüdern*, the author comes to the three writers whose method and technique he wishes to study. Of these Keller stands somewhat apart from Storm and Meyer in that the latter employ the outer framework to enclose a single story, whereas the former still continues the old tradition of a series or collection of tales held together by a more or less elaborate framework. The motives that impel the modern writer to employ the form of the story-within-the-story are mostly technical and æsthetic, as opposed to the more evident aim of the ancient compilers. In many cases the author wishes merely to preserve the advantage of narration in the first person, and accordingly puts the story into the mouth of a person introduced to the reader in the "frame." An interesting device to preserve the same advantage in the case

of persons long dead is the introduction or feigned discovery of an old manuscript, diary or correspondence. Here the remote past is brought up close to the imagination of the reader, much in the same way that a distant object is drawn close to the eye through the medium of powerful field glasses. "Nowhere is the effect of narration in the first person stronger than in this class of fiction. It must be handled, to be sure, with corresponding art and skill. The idea of the manuscript must be kept constantly before the reader's mind, in order that the illusion of an ancient parchment, with its poetical effect, may not grow dim and fade away before his eyes."

Not only are Keller's prose works, including *Der grüne Heinrich* and *Martin Salander*, in the form in which it was originally planned, collections or cycles, but his poems also appear in the same category. Thus, in his earliest published volume, the *Gedichte* of 1846, we find the cycles: *Lebendig begraben*, *Feuer-Idylle*, *Siebenundzwanzig Liebeslieder*. And Dr. Bracher is undoubtedly correct in saying: "The cycle is for him the favorite form, because it is the most convenient for receiving such a wealth of fantasy."

Keller, therefore, resembles his ancient prototypes, in that he also is seeking to store away his overflowing supply of material—material, however, of his own creation.

In the pages devoted to Keller, Dr. Bracher sketches with skill the development of the artist's constructive or synthetic ability, which reaches its height in the *Sinngedicht*. Here the enframing narrative not only contains the six tales recounted by Reinhart and Lucie, but, as it were, produces and governs them, so that like the complications in the first two or three acts of a drama, they serve partly to retard and partly to advance the action of the main plot, which here for the first time is removed from the inner to the outer narrative. The *Sinngedicht*, therefore, reveals an artistic unity, a compactness of structure, such as none of Keller's predecessors in this type of literature attained or, indeed, aimed at.

With the first chapter devoted to Keller, the reader rather expects to find the second and third chapters occupied with a similar treatment of the art of Meyer and Storm. These, however, are headed, respectively:

The manuscript in the service of framework fiction, and  
The enframed tale.

The subdivisions of the former must suffice to give an idea of Dr. Bracher's procedure, in lieu of a more detailed presentation of the contents. They are as follows: The nature of the manuscript (correspondence, memoirs, diaries, etc.). The introduction of the manuscript. The scribe. The technical aim of the manuscript.

Meyer and Storm are mentioned frequently (as are also Paul Heyse, Hoffmann and others), but the interest which in the first chapter centered about the author treated is here replaced by a more general investigation of method and technique, Meyer, Storm and Heyse serving as points of departure and points of return. It is impossible to do entire justice to this book in a brief review, inasmuch as its value lies in large part in its suggestive aperçus, which do not permit of condensation or classification. Thus of Storm's heroes the author remarks: "In their tendency to the tragic they are almost all of them related to Werther. They are men who allow a hostile fate to grow above their heads, instead of turning it with powerful hand to their advantage." And of Heyse's heroes: "One can observe in most of them a certain naïveté in matters of taste."

While not intended as a manual of instruction for novelists and story tellers, Dr. Bracher's monograph contains many hints that would be of great practical value to the young literary artist, in so far as this art can be acquired through an analysis of the writings of the masters.

The weakest, indeed, the only weak part of the book, is the conclusion (*Schluss*). The reader looking for a summary of the contents is somewhat disappointed to find nothing but apologies, particularly when the latter appear quite uncalled for. The modern reader understands without being told that what he has just read is not necessarily the final word on the subject.

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